

I claim:

1           1.     A surgical apparatus, comprising:  
2                     a relatively short, relatively stiff shaft defining a distal region and  
3     a proximal region; and  
4                     a tissue stimulation element associated with the distal region of  
5     the shaft.

1           2.     A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least a  
2     portion of the shaft is malleable.

1           3.     A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:  
2                     a flexible tissue engagement device associated with the distal  
3     region of the shaft;  
4                     wherein the tissue stimulation element is on the flexible tissue  
5     engagement device.

1           4.     A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the tissue  
2     stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode.

1           5.     A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the tissue  
2     stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode pair.

1           6.     A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the distal  
2     region of the shaft does not include a coagulation element.

1           7.     A surgical apparatus, comprising:  
2                     a tube defining a proximal region and a distal region;  
3                     a suction device associated with the distal region of the tube;  
4     and  
5                     a tissue stimulation element on the suction device.

1           8.     A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the tube  
2           comprises a flexible tube.

1           9.     A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the suction  
2           device comprises a flexible suction device.

1           10.    A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the suction  
2           device is substantially cup-shaped.

1           11.    A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the tissue  
2           stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode.

1           12.    A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the tissue  
2           stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode pair.

1           13.    A surgical method, comprising the steps of:  
2                    inserting a tissue stimulation element carried on a relatively  
3           short, relatively stiff shaft into a patient; and  
4                    stimulating tissue with the stimulation element.

1           14.    A surgical method as claimed in claim 13, further comprising the  
2           step of:  
3                    placing the distal region of the relatively short shaft directly  
4           against tissue.

1           15.    A surgical method as claimed in claim 13, wherein the step of  
2           inserting a tissue stimulation element comprises inserting a stimulation  
3           electrode pair carried on a relatively short, relatively stiff shaft into a patient.

1           16.    A surgical method as claimed in claim 13, further comprising the  
2           step of:  
3                    monitoring tissue in spaced relation to the stimulated tissue.

1           17.    A surgical method as claimed in claim 16, wherein

2           the step of inserting a tissue stimulation element comprises  
 3           inserting first and second tissue stimulation elements carried on a relatively  
 4           short, relatively stiff shaft into a patient;  
 5           the step of stimulating tissue comprises stimulating tissue on  
 6           one side of a lesion with the first tissue stimulation element; and  
 7           the step of monitoring tissue comprises monitoring tissue on the  
 8           other side of the lesion with the second tissue stimulation element.

1           18.    A surgical method as claimed in claim 16, wherein  
 2           the step of inserting a tissue stimulation element comprises  
 3           inserting a first tissue stimulation element carried on a first relatively short,  
 4           relatively stiff shaft into a patient and inserting a second tissue stimulation  
 5           element carried on second relatively short, relatively stiff shaft into a patient;  
 6           the step of stimulating tissue comprises stimulating tissue on  
 7           one side of a lesion with the first tissue stimulation element; and  
 8           the step of monitoring tissue comprises monitoring tissue on the  
 9           other side of the lesion with the second tissue stimulation element.

1           19.    A surgical method, comprising the steps of:  
 2           positioning a tissue stimulation element against tissue;  
 3           applying a suction force to hold the stimulation element against  
 4           the tissue; and  
 5           stimulating tissue with the stimulation element.

1           20.    A surgical method as claimed in claim 19, wherein the step of  
 2           positioning a tissue stimulation element comprises positioning a stimulation  
 3           electrode pair against tissue.

1           21.    A surgical method as claimed in claim 19, wherein the step of  
 2           positioning a tissue stimulation element comprises positioning a suction  
 3           device that carries a stimulation element against tissue.

1           22.    A surgical method as claimed in claim 19, further comprising the  
 2           step of:

3 monitoring tissue in spaced relation to the stimulated tissue.

1 23. A surgical method as claimed in claim 22, wherein  
2 the step of positioning a tissue stimulation element comprises  
3 positioning first and second tissue stimulation elements against tissue;  
4 the step of stimulating tissue comprises stimulating tissue on  
5 one side of a lesion with the first tissue stimulation element; and  
6 the step of monitoring tissue comprises monitoring tissue on the  
7 other side of the lesion with the second tissue stimulation element.

1 24. A surgical method as claimed in claim 22, wherein  
2 the step of positioning a tissue stimulation element comprises  
3 positioning a first suction device carrying a first tissue stimulation element on  
4 one side of a lesion and positioning a second suction device carrying a  
5 second tissue stimulation element on the other side of the lesion;  
6 the step of stimulating tissue comprises stimulating tissue on  
7 one side of the lesion with the first tissue stimulation element; and  
8 the step of monitoring tissue comprises monitoring tissue on the  
9 other side of the lesion with the second tissue stimulation element.

1 25. A surgical system for use with tissue, comprising:  
2 a source of stimulation energy; and  
3 a surgical apparatus, operably connected to the source of  
4 stimulation energy, including  
5 a relatively short, relatively stiff shaft defining a distal  
6 region and a proximal region; and  
7 a tissue stimulation element associated with the distal  
8 region of the shaft.

1 26. A surgical system as claimed in claim 25, wherein the tissue  
2 stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode pair.

1 27. A surgical system as claimed in claim 25, wherein the distal  
2 region of the shaft does not include a coagulation element.

1           28.    A surgical system for use with tissue, comprising:  
2                   a source of stimulation energy;  
3                   a suction source; and  
4                   a surgical apparatus including  
5                         a tube, operably connected to suction source, defining a  
6 proximal region and a distal region,  
7                         a suction device associated with the distal region of the  
8 tube, and  
9                         a tissue stimulation element, operably connected to the  
10 source of stimulation energy, on the suction device.

1           29.    A surgical system as claimed in claim 28, wherein the tissue  
2 stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode pair.

1           30.    A surgical system as claimed in claim 28, wherein the distal  
2 region of the shaft does not include a coagulation element.